PLAN

of the CITY of

Washington,

in the Territory of Columbia

ceded by the States of

VIRGINIA and MARYLAND

to the

United States of America

1 | *The Grand Design 1790–1800*

The Grand Design

"To found a city in the center of the United States, for the purpose of making it the depository of the acts of the Union, and the sanctuary of the laws which must one day rule all North America, is a grand and comprehensive idea," were the opening words of the "Essay on the City of Washington," published in the *Washington Gazette* on November 19, 1796. The anonymous essay described Washington in extravagant allegorical terms, some of them very suggestive of ideas discernable in Major Peter Charles L'Enfant's visionary 1791–92 plan, but most did not correspond to what was being implemented. The first description of the federal city, written by "Spectator" and appearing in the September 26, 1791, issue of the *Maryland Journal,* was a reliable description of the strikingly picturesque land adjacent to Georgetown, Maryland. Moreover, it was a laudatory précis of the city's revolutionary design—"everything grand and beautiful that can possibly be introduced into a city." In 1794 President George Washington's secretary, Tobias Lear, published *Observations on the River Potomack,* a factual account that focused on what businessmen and developers would need to know about local conditions and services.[1]

Opposite page: L'Enfant's "Plan of the City of Washington," 1792

Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

Silhouette of Peter Charles L'Enfant. This is the only known authentic image of L'Enfant.
Diplomatic Reception Rooms, U.S. Department of State

Thus, before the federal government moved to the permanent capital in 1800, the public already had been apprised of its unique character because the entire range of L'Enfant's intentions had been discussed in the public press. To design a beautiful city that addressed the political realities of its location within the country, its pragmatic problems due to its site, and its symbolism as an expression of the Revolution's achievements were the French engineer-architect's goals. L'Enfant (1755–1825), the son of a painter at the French court of Louis XVI, came to America in 1777. Although no record has been found in France of L'Enfant's military training, and only cursory notice of his artistic education as his father's student, from the age of twenty-two, L'Enfant served first in the French and then in the Continental Army as a military engineer. During the winter of 1778, he served with the Continental Army at Valley Forge where he was one of the illustrators for acting inspector general Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben's manual of military maneuvers, and served as one of Washington's trusted couriers. L'Enfant was appointed captain of engineers in April 1779, after which he was assigned to work with General Johann de Kalb. Fighting in the southern theater, L'Enfant was wounded at the battle of Savannah in October 1779, taken prisoner at Charleston in May 1780, and exchanged in November.[2]

L'ENFANT PROPOSES CORPS OF ENGINEERS

On January 1, 1784, when L'Enfant was honorably discharged from the Continental Army, he decided to remain in the United States because he expected that he would lead the Corps of Engineers in his adopted country's reorganized peacetime Army. On December 15, 1784, he wrote the president of Congress:

> *Having been led to expect that such an establishment would take place I should now be doubly disappointed if it should not as by remaining here I have lost the opportunity of getting employment in my own Country from which I have been the more encouraged to absent myself as Brigadier General Kosciuszko at leaving this Continent gave me the flattering expectation of being at the head of a department in which if successful I shall endeavour to render my services agreeable to the United States.*[3]

The accompanying "memorial" L'Enfant submitted to Congress proposed a peacetime Corps, with an emphasis on a broad technical and cultural education for engineers. He proposed that they be proficient in mathematics, mechanics, architecture, hydraulics,

Detail from L'Enfant's panorama of West Point, 1780
U.S. Military Academy Library

drawing, and "natural philosophy," the latter "necessary to judge of the nature of the Several materials which are used in building" because L'Enfant foresaw the Corps as playing a key role in the development of the country's public as well as its military infrastructure.

> *The duty of the said Corps shall be to attend to and have the direction of all the fortified places that of all military and civil building, the maintenance of the Roads bridges and Every Kind of work at the public charge. [S]urveys of the several places Shall be by them made and properly drawn with a view to make out an atlas of the whole Continent from which the Supreme power may be able to obtain a more just idea of its situation and forme a distinct opinion upon its advantages and defects. [T]o these plans Shall be added proper Notes and Remarks with Schemes for taking advantage of good positions or of preventing the defects of some unavoidable inconveniency.*[4]

The visionary rather than practical nature of L'Enfant's proposed Corps of Engineers, coupled with his self-serving and convoluted means of expression, probably led the congressional committee that reviewed it to conclude, "the situation of the military posts in the U. States does not require the establishment of a Corps of Engineers on the plan of the memorialist." Yet the elite, educated Corps that L'Enfant envisaged became a reality within a quarter century.[5]

L'Enfant's model for the American Corps of Engineers was a synthesis of the French government's system for commissioning public and military works: public architecture was centralized under the king, the "architecte du roi" holding a ministerial post equivalent

to the secretary of war who oversaw all military installations. In contrast, the traditional English system for overseeing large civic building projects was to appoint commissioners (typically three, one of whom often was the architect), leading citizens who posted a bond to guarantee their honesty as they had control of the project's finances; jointly they made all decisions regarding design and construction.

THE FEDERAL CITY PROPOSED

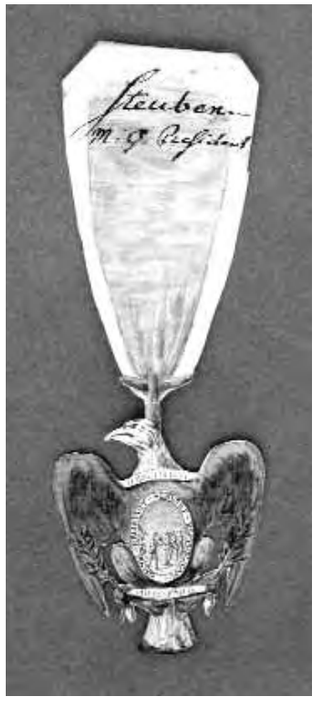
During the late 1780s L'Enfant kept in close contact with his former military comrades, including Washington, while he pursued a civilian career as an architect and engineer. L'Enfant later claimed, "when it was contemplated by the old Congress to establish a federal city on the bank of the river delawar in the year 1787 I had made considerable progress in the survey of ground, and in the preparation of the plan of a city first intended there, but the project of that national establishment having been given up, I was encouraged to expect due compensation at some future day." L'Enfant may have been mistaken about the date; on February 2, 1785, Samuel Hardy nominated L'Enfant as one of two commissioners "for erecting the federal buildings." Ten months later L'Enfant wrote the Marquis de Lafayette about his disappointment concerning failed projected plans for a federal city.[6]

In 1789 Congress debated "laying the foundation of a city which is to become the Capital of this vast Empire" on the Susquehanna River. L'Enfant wrote Washington in September seeking the appointment as its projector and renewed a suggestion he made in his 1784 proposal, the need to fortify America's seacoast.

> *[H]aving had the honor to belong to the Corps of Engineer acting under your orders during the late war, and being the only officer of that Corps remaining on the Continent I must confess I have long flattered myself with the hope of a reappointment….I view the appointment of Engineer to the United States as the one which could possibly be most gratifying to my wishes and the necessety of such an office to superintend & direct the fortifications necessary in the United States is sufficently apparent[.] [T]he advantage to be derived from the appointment will appear more striking when it is considered that the sciences of Military and Civil architecture are so connected as to render an Engineer equally serviceable in time of Peace as in war, by the employment of his abilities in the internal improvement of the Country.*[7]

THE IMPACT OF L'ENFANT'S 1780S DESIGNS

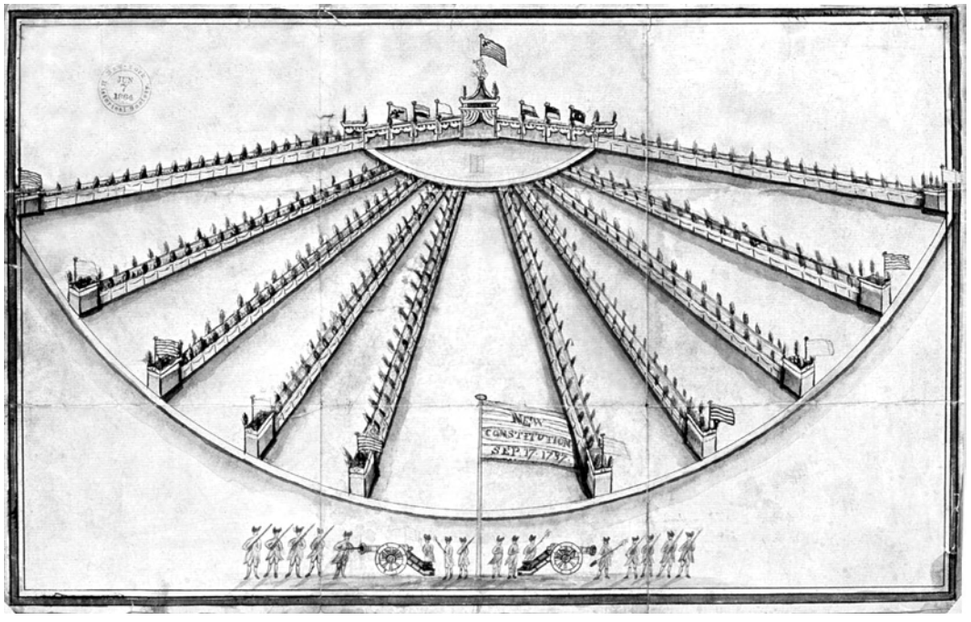
L'Enfant's most significant non-military national contributions in the 1780s were in the realm of spectacles, emblematic designs, and public architecture. The form and general content of these projects contributed to his appointment as the federal city's designer early in 1791. In 1782 L'Enfant designed a forty-foot by sixty-foot dancing pavilion at the Philadelphia residence of French Minister Chevalier de la Luzerne for a party to celebrate the birth of the French Dauphin. Newspapers and journals described L'Enfant's design and decorations as the intermingling of French and American symbols, principally a rising sun representing America and a sun at its zenith representing France. On June 10, 1783, L'Enfant sent to von Steuben, President of the Society of The Cincinnati of which L'Enfant was a founding member, drawings and a description of the society's eagle badge; L'Enfant subsequently traveled to France to arrange for its diploma to be engraved and its eagle badges to be made by a French jeweler. America's official emblem, the Great Seal of the United States, evolved between 1776 and 1782: an American eagle with a shield of thirteen stripes on its breast and an aureole of thirteen stars over its head, an olive branch with thirteen leaves symbolizing peace grasped in one claw, and in the other, thirteen arrows symbolizing war. Its first non-governmental use was on the emblems L'Enfant designed for the Society of The Cincinnati.[8]



L'Enfant's watercolor of the Eagle Badge of the Society of The Cincinnati
Courtesy of the Society of The Cincinnati

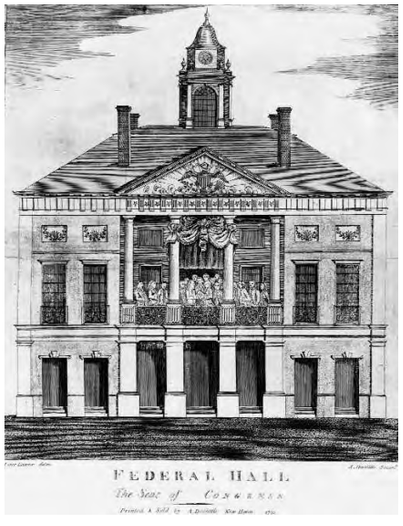
Of all the constructions made by American cities in 1788 to celebrate ratification of the U.S. Constitution (generally floats in parades), the largest and most symbolically inclusive was L'Enfant's banqueting tables erected in New York at the destination of its July 23rd parade. Ten 440-foot-long tables represented the states that voted for the Constitution, each terminating in a pavilion decorated with state flags and insignia for state officials. They radiated from a central podium where members of the federal government and foreign ministers dined under a dome surmounted by a figure of fame. Six thousand people were served dinner at L'Enfant's banqueting tables, which were erected in less than five days.[9]

The success of New York's Federal Procession was L'Enfant's success and, in September 1788, led to the acceptance of his proposal to renovate New York's old City Hall into Federal Hall. L'Enfant added a neoclassical façade and a Senate chamber to the existing building where the First Federal Congress met for two sessions and where George Washington was inaugurated president on April 30, 1789. His emblematic decorations for the façade—the eagle of the Great Seal of the United States in the pediment above the balcony, thirteen stars representing the original states in the entablature below the pediment, and relief sculpted panels with olive branches and arrows above the second story



L'Enfant's design for the federal banquet pavilion to celebrate the ratification of the Constitution, New York City, 1788
Collection of The New-York Historical Society, no. 1864.17

windows—identified Federal Hall's function. L'Enfant designed elaborate nationalistic decorations for the House of Representatives (a room he totally renovated), and Senate chambers so large and architecturally complex that they were not completed before they were dismantled. Federal Hall's rich and imposing appearance was a great success among Federalists, but suspect among many Democratic-Republicans who found it too grand to represent a republican government. Yet, the success of all these projects convinced many that L'Enfant had a genius for innovative design and worked well with craftsmen who built his elegant structures quickly, albeit not economically.[10]



Federal Hall in New York, 1788–89, designed by L'Enfant
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-333

WASHINGTON HIRES L'ENFANT

On July 16, 1790, Congress passed the Residence Act that established the permanent seat of government on the Potomac River. The city's boundaries were to be defined by three commissioners appointed by the president, its design "according to such plans as the President shall approve, the said commissioners, or any two of them, shall, prior to the first Monday in December 1800, provide suitable buildings for the accommodation of Congress, and the President, and for the public offices of the government of the U.S." On January 22, 1791, Washington appointed Daniel Carroll and Thomas Johnson of Maryland, and Virginian David Stuart, all personal friends and political allies, as the commissioners for the District of Columbia. A week later Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote Johnson that Washington had written L'Enfant (letter not found) because he considered him "peculiarly qualified to make such a draught of the ground as will

enable himself to fix on the spot for the public buildings." Jefferson and Washington both wrote Georgetowners Francis Deakins and Benjamin Stoddert on March 2, to alert them of L'Enfant's arrival.[11]

The same day, Jefferson ordered L'Enfant to Georgetown where he would find Major Andrew Ellicott already engaged on

> *a survey and map of the federal territory. The special object of asking your aid is to have drawings of the particular grounds most likely to be approved for the site of the federal town and buildings. You will therefore be pleased to begin on the Eastern branch, and proceed from then upwards, laying down the hills, vallies, morasses, and waters between that, the Patowmac, the Tyber, and the road leading from George town to the Eastern branch, and connecting the whole with certain fixed points on the map Mr. Ellicot is preparing. Some idea of the height of the hills above the base on which they stand would be desireable.*[12]

No further written instructions, nor offer of payment, to L'Enfant have been located. Major Ellicott (1754–1820), whose Revolutionary War commission was with the Maryland militia rather than the Corps of Engineers, began working as a surveyor in 1784 on the Pennsylvania boundaries. Early in 1791 Washington appointed him to survey the District of Columbia's ten-mile-square, assisted by the African-American amateur astronomer Benjamin Banneker, and later, his brother, Benjamin Ellicott. In 1799 Ellicott published his account of the survey in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society,* thirteen years after election to that body's membership. He continued to receive federal and state government commissions to survey state boundaries in Florida, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and South Carolina until his appointment in 1813 as professor of mathematics at West Point, a position that L'Enfant refused.[13]

Jefferson continued to send L'Enfant his orders, but L'Enfant addressed most of his reports to Washington. By the autumn of 1791, L'Enfant was in open revolt against the authority of the commissioners; when he turned to Washington for support he was told that the commissioners represented the law and that he was answerable to them. Washington cited L'Enfant's letter of appointment from the commissioners, which has not been found. Understandably, L'Enfant was confused about the chain of command, receiving orders from Washington, the commissioners, and Jefferson—if, in fact, he received all three letters. We only know that Jefferson asked L'Enfant initially to make a topographical survey of the land

between Georgetown and the Eastern Branch, later called the Anacostia River. L'Enfant believed that Washington commissioned him to design the federal city and all of its public buildings, to be in effect the "engineer-architect to the President" on the French model he proposed to Congress in 1784 and again to Washington in 1789. He either ignored or did not understand the import of the traditional English system of building commissioners who met regularly, made decisions, and paid the bills, the common practice in America during the eighteenth century.

SITING THE FEDERAL CITY WITHIN THE FEDERAL DISTRICT

In his first report written on March 11, 1791, L'Enfant gave Jefferson his impressions of the varied and extensive ground between Georgetown and the Anacostia River as he sought the best location for a "small town," although he ventured that "the intended city on that grand Scale on which it ought to be planed" was more appropriate to express the United States. Jefferson's reply was to order L'Enfant to make topographical drawings of the land between Georgetown and Tiber Creek, the area where Jefferson himself located his own federal city design, which he presented to Washington sometime between August 1790 and March 1791. In a postscript to his letter, Jefferson cautioned L'Enfant not to divulge the results of his surveys.

> *There are certainly considerable advantages on the Eastern branch: but there are very strong reasons also in favor of the position between Rock creek and Tyber independent of the face of the ground. It is the desire that the public mind should be in equilibrio between these two places till the President arrives, and we shall be obliged to you to endeavor to poise their expectations.*

L'Enfant's surveys over the entire ground excited great speculation in Georgetown because one of two local groups—those landowners whose holdings were contiguous to Georgetown or those whose property lay near the town of Carrollsburg near the Eastern Branch—would benefit materially by his decision as to where to locate the federal city within the ten-mile-square federal district.

Three weeks later, when Washington came to Georgetown in late March, L'Enfant handed him an eight-page report that described the beauty of the Eastern Branch site, evaluated it in practical terms, and enumerated its potential as the capital of an "Extensive Empire." The engineer immediately saw the need for two bridges, one across the Eastern

Branch above Evans Point (where East Capitol Street now crosses the Anacostia River), and the other across the Potomac River where Key Bridge now crosses the Potomac. Both bridges were depicted on the surviving manuscript map and some of the early published maps, which also show the location of the ferry that crossed the Anacostia near the Navy Yard. They were crucial to L'Enfant's initial scheme of centering the federal city on Jenkins Hill: "begining the Setlement of the Grand City on the bank of the eastern branch and promoting the first improvement all along of the Height flat as far as w[h]ere it end on Jenkins Hill."

To connect the federal city to Georgetown, L'Enfant planned a

> *large avenue [now Pennsylvania Avenue] from the bridge on the potowmac to that on the Eastern branch….with a midle way paved for heavy carriage and walks on each side planted with double Rows of trees to the end that by making it a communication as agreeable as it will be convenient….*

L'Enfant speculated that such an avenue traversing the entire city would encourage owners to build on contiguous properties and thus visually diminish its length, as well as reflect the "Greatness which a city the Capitale of a powerful Empire ought to manifest."[14]

L'Enfant's intention from the outset was to benefit all the local inhabitants, a principle that he incorporated into his final design. No topographical surveys of the two locales Jefferson requested are known to survive and L'Enfant seemingly ignored the Secretary of State's order to turn his attention to the area adjacent to Georgetown. Moreover, he far exceeded both Jefferson's and Washington's expectations by recommending the Eastern Branch site. L'Enfant's independence in this regard was a precursor of his future behavior.

On March 28, 1791, Washington met with the "contending interests of Georgetown and Carrollsburg" to settle on the federal city's site. He laconically noted in his diary that after meeting with them he examined the works of L'Enfant, who had been (reiterating for the record) "engaged to examine, & make a draught of the grds in the vicinity of George town and Carrollsburg." Washington's response to L'Enfant's report and his meeting with him is recorded in the agreement he made with the proprietors of land, information he immediately conveyed to Jefferson on March 31, 1791.[15]

> *The terms agreed on between me, on the part of the United States, with the Land holders of Georgetown and Carrollsburg are. That all the land from Rock creek along the river to the Eastern-branch and so upwards to or above*

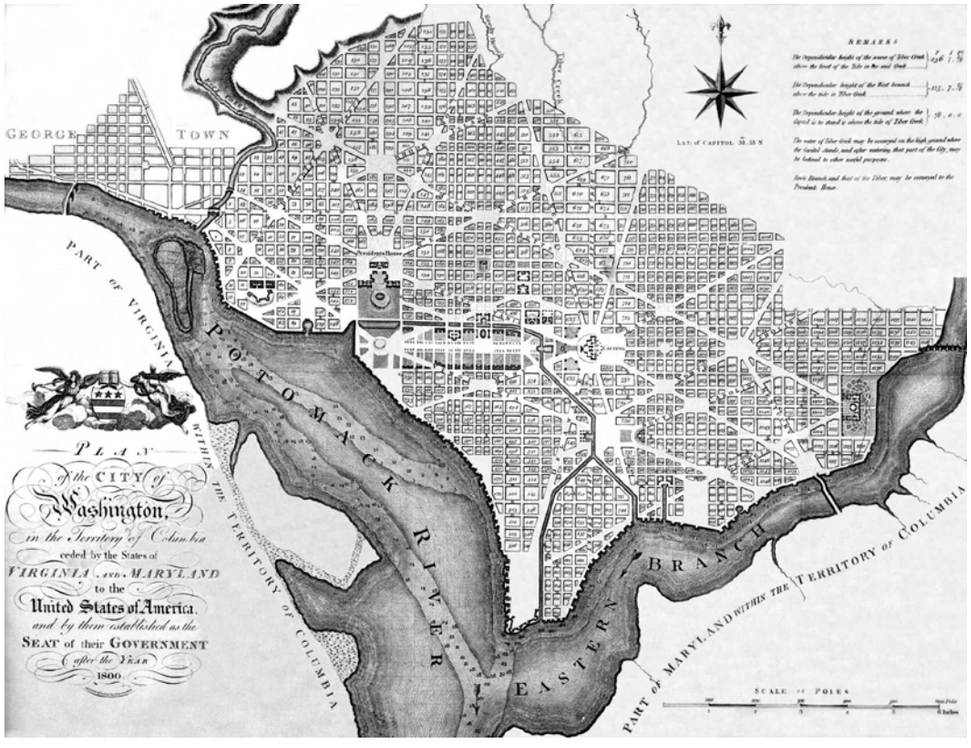
> *the Ferry including a breadth of about a mile and a half, the whole containing from three to five thousand acres is ceded to the public, on condition That, when the whole shall be surveyed and laid off as a city, (which Major L'Enfant is now directed to do) the present Proprietors shall retain every other lot; and, for such part of the land as may be taken for public use, for squares, walks, &ca., they shall be allowed at the rate of Twenty five pounds per acre.*[16]

On April 4 Washington wrote L'Enfant, "it will be of great importance to the public interest to comprehend as much ground (to be ceded by individuals) as there is any tolerable prospect of obtaining." Washington then outlined the land he wanted included in the federal city.

Washington, who began his career as a surveyor, also suggested that L'Enfant include land as far north as the Bladensburg Road—presently K Streets, NW and NE—and across Rock Creek above Georgetown. Thus, stimulated by L'Enfant's visionary idea of a great city as an analogue of an "extensive empire," and influenced by the political need to reconcile all of the local inhabitants in order to ensure the success of the entire undertaking, Washington decided on a city that he estimated would be three to five thousand acres in extent. L'Enfant's final plan encompassed 6,111 acres and the public reservations and streets comprised 54.6 percent of the total land area to the decided advantage of the government. Writing to Alexander Hamilton on April 8, L'Enfant took credit for suggesting the city's immense scale: "I gave imagination its full Scope in invading all the property….and carrying on my scheme further in extending my ideas so to lead the way to future and progressive improvement[.] I ventured some remarks thereon the which I submitted to the President on his arrival at this place and was fortunate enough to see meet with his approbation."[17]

L'ENFANT'S DESIGN PROCESS

On the same day Washington wrote L'Enfant, the engineer wrote Jefferson asking him for the "number and nature of the publick building with the necessary appending" and for maps of eight specific European cities "together with particular maps of any such sea ports or dock yards, and arsenals as you may know to be the most compleat in their Improvement." Six days later Jefferson sent L'Enfant maps of twelve cities he collected during his five-year tenure as America's minister to France between 1784–89; only Paris and Amsterdam corresponded with those on L'Enfant's list. Jefferson reiterated Washington's suggestion about



L'Enfant's "Plan of the City of Washington," 1792
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

generous apportionment for public grounds. "Considering that the grounds to be reserved for the public are to be paid for by the acre, I think very liberal reservations should be made for them."[18]

When he wrote his April 10, 1791, letter, Jefferson must have seen the pencil sketches L'Enfant had given Washington, read the engineer's March 26 report, or the president had explained L'Enfant's general concepts, because Jefferson further noted "those connected with the government will prefer fixing themselves near the public grounds in the center, which will also be convenient to be resorted to as walks from the lower & upper town." Washington enclosed Jefferson's own federal city plan in the letter he sent L'Enfant on April 4; one of its outstanding features was extensive "public walks" along the shores of the Tiber Creek that connected the "Capitol" and "President." In his April 10th letter, Jefferson wanted to ensure that L'Enfant knew the federal city's genesis was a collaborative effort on the part of many individuals. "[H]aving communicated to the President, before he went away, such general ideas on the subject of the town, as occurred to me, I make no doubt that, in explaining himself to you on the subject, he has interwoven with his own ideas, such of mine as he approved."[19]

In this same letter, Jefferson looked forward to the design of the public buildings. "[W]henever it is proposed to prepare plans for the Capitol, I should prefere the adoption

of some one of the models of antiquity which have had the approbation of thousands of years; and for the President's house, I should prefer the celebrated fronts of Modern [Renaissance and post-Renaissance] buildings which have already received the approbation of all good judges. [S]uch are the Galerie du Louvre, the Gardes meubles, and two fronts of the Hotel de Salm."[20]

L'Enfant's second report to Washington made on June 22, 1791, was accompanied by a now lost map of the city. The grandeur of his conception is evident throughout this report, but apparently he only designed the city's central core at that point. The "Congressional building" would be located on the west side of Jenkins Hill "which stand as a pedestal waiting for a monument" and the "presidential palace" would combine the "sumptuousness of a palace the conveniance of a house and the agreableness of a country seat situated on that ridge which attracted your [Washington's] attention at the first inspection of the ground." While L'Enfant the visionary was the predominant voice in this report, L'Enfant the engineer (albeit a visionary one) did surface. Speaking of the Capitol's site, he noted that other locations might require less labor to "be rendered agreable" than Jenkins Hill, "but after all assistance of arts none Ever would be made so grand."[21]

…the "presidential palace" would combine the "sumptuousness of a palace the conveniance of a house and the agreableness of a country seat situated on that ridge which attracted your [Washington's] attention at the first inspection of the ground."

The Mall, canal, executive department offices (adjoining the president's house), "grand Equestrian figure" (presumably of Washington), and forty-foot-tall cascade "issuing from under the base of the congress building," had been conceptualized by mid-June. Although they were told some details would change, L'Enfant's unique fusion of the orthogonal grid of streets irregularly transversed by wider diagonal avenues to be the city's plan was shown to the proprietors of land on June 28 after they signed the deeds. Prior to its public display, Washington himself chose the exact location of the public buildings, moving the president's house "more westerly for the advantage of higher ground." The proprietors also were promised a "Town house, or exchange" located between the two principle government complexes.[22]

L'ENFANT'S INDEPENDENCE

During July 1791 L'Enfant began making inquiries about engraving the map. This seemingly simple task became a major complication, partly because he wanted the map to be on a large scale and no copper plate of sufficient size could be found in Philadelphia. In addition, L'Enfant did not want sales of lots to go forward until the city's true complexity

shown on the plan also was apparent on the ground; he feared that only lots near the Capitol and president's house would be sold. Once again, he made an important political decision based on his own perspective without Washington's, Jefferson's, or the commissioners' prior knowledge or approval. In August Washington ordered him to Philadelphia, and on the 19th he delivered two maps, one, a "map of doted lines" that indicated the progress of the survey, the second, the city's virtually completed design with its many public buildings delineated. L'Enfant concluded his accompanying report with a discussion of how the city's development should be managed, suggesting that a loan be sought rather than a public sale of lots: "it is in this manner and in this manner only I conceive the business may be Conducted." Washington, Jefferson, and James Madison met with L'Enfant on August 27; the following day Jefferson wrote the commissioners proposing a meeting on the 7th or 8th of September so that "certain measures may be decided on and put into a course of preparation" to ensure that a sale of lots could take place on October 17th.[23]

Beginning in September the commissioners took a more decisive role in the affairs of the city. On the 24th they ordered L'Enfant to employ 150 laborers "to throw up clay at the presidents house and the house of Congress" to begin the process of laying their foundations. On October 10th they resolved that the surveyor Andrew Ellicott "proceed to lay off directly a number of Lots immediately around and fronting the Squares on which the president's house and Capitol are to be built." These orders were given before L'Enfant had produced plans for either building. After the engineer had been dismissed, Jefferson wrote Commissioner Thomas Johnson on March 8, 1792, that "Majr. L'Enfant had no plans prepared for the Capitol or government house. [H]e said he had them in his head. I do not believe he will produce them for concurrence." The dimensions of L'Enfant's president's house have been calculated to be about 696 feet east to west and 206 feet north to south based on the convergence of sightlines of the neighboring streets. (James Hoban's building is 170 feet long by 86 feet deep.)[24]

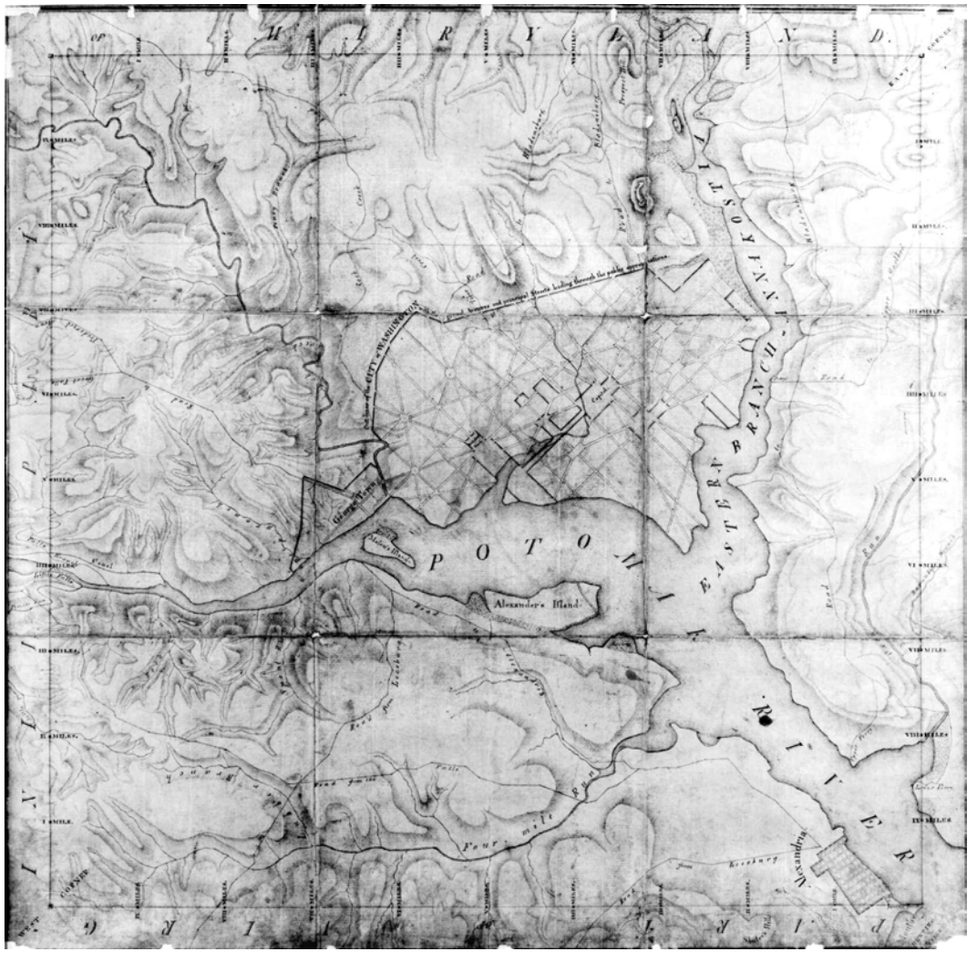
Jefferson and Johnson were cognizant of the discrepancy between the scale of the public spaces and the probable buildings that would be located there. "I fear your other apprehension is better founded," Jefferson wrote Johnson, "to wit, that the avenues are made to converge to the ends of a building of supposed extent, that the building may very probably be of less extent, and consequently not reach the points of view created for its use." The larger issue was the credibility of the entire federal city: if the published maps showed plans of buildings that did not correspond with those being built, sales of lots

would suffer and those who wished to keep the government in Philadelphia would prevail. On April 11, 1792, the commissioners wrote Jefferson concerning the problem with L'Enfant's location of the Capitol. Notley Young's new house stood within the grounds designated for the Capitol and he would have to be compensated as much as fifteen thousand pounds unless the Capitol were moved about nine hundred feet. Their concern was the public's negative perception of changes to the plan (the map had not yet been published but its characteristics were widely known).

> *We cannot but be uneasy of the situation Chosen for the Capitol….Ellicott says…it will not take above 3, or 4 weeks to correct what will be necessary. This may be shortened, we have no doubt by introducing a few accurate measures, and the difference of expence much in favour of it….[Ellicott] says and the Fact is that the Deviation from the Plate will be imperceptable but on measuring, and that the Plate will convey an Idea of the work sufficiently exact to any man living.*[25]

Descriptions of the problems of placing L'Enfant's plan on the varied topography abound. For example, Benjamin Ogle Tayloe came to Washington in 1801, and later recalled that the "distinguished John Cotton Smith told me that when he was a Senator from Connecticut he attended President Adams's levee in Washington, in 1801, and that members of Congress living, like himself, on Capitol Hill, found it necessary to send to Baltimore for hackney coaches to convey them to the President's House; and to avoid the swamps of Pennsylvania Avenue, they had to travel along F Street and the high grounds adjoining." Although the same difficulties would be faced implementing any geometric plan, the combination of the federal city's immense scale; the difference in widths between its grid streets (meant for neighborhoods) and its avenues (meant to be processional); the unequal size of the blocks (necessary for the diagonals and grid to interlock); very hilly terrain; multiple streams and two rivers; and, tidal marshes complicated the matter considerably.[26]

The time between L'Enfant's arrival in March 1791 and when he was expected to produce the finished map and drawings of the public buildings was unrealistic. However, he created this situation himself when he convinced Washington to include more than six thousand acres in the city; the heavily wooded land could not be adequately surveyed before the October sale of lots. Washington recognized these difficulties. "The work of Majr. L'Enfant (wch. is greatly admired) will shew that he had many objects to attend to and to combine; not on paper merely, but to make them corrispond with the *actual*



Andrew Ellicott's "Map of the District of Columbia," 1793. Andrew Ellicott, assisted by Benjamin Ellicott and Benjamin Baneker, surveyed the boundaries of the ten-mile-square District of Columbia while L'Enfant was designing the federal city.
Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, 1069.1

circumstances of the ground." L'Enfant's projected public buildings could not be drawn on the scale and with the elaborateness that he conceived within a few months without a large number of draftsmen. Again, L'Enfant was responsible for this situation; he may well have made sketches of the dozen buildings whose convincing plans were on his manuscript map and, later, engravings. However, to translate such sketches into presentation and then working drawings for construction was the labor of months.[27]

L'Enfant's known assistants were Isaac Roberdeau, Stephen S. Hallet, and Charles de Krafft. Roberdeau was his most trusted ally, eventually arrested in January 1792 for following L'Enfant's orders rather than those of the commissioners. In 1816 Roberdeau, now a major in the Topographical Engineers, returned to Washington and had an important career carrying forward one of L'Enfant's 1784 dictates for the Corps—mapping the continent. Hallet, a French-trained architect who emigrated at the outbreak of the French Revolution, worked as L'Enfant's draftsman during the autumn of 1791, making a reduced version of the plan for the engravers. His design in the 1792–93 Capitol

competition placed second and, in a compromise intended to take advantage of his superior architectural education, he was put in charge of constructing the Capitol—the exteriors following the winning design by William Thornton, the interiors designed by Hallet. In 1794 Thornton, now one of the commissioners, fired Hallet for deviating from this compromise plan. Little is known of Hallet's later career, although he remained in Washington for a short time, hired by real estate developer Theophile Cazanove to design houses.[28]

The *Georgetown Weekly Ledger* of July 2, 1791, reported that "a large number of gentlemen attending, a plan of the city, which had for several weeks occupied the time and talents of Colonel L'Enfant, assisted by the Baron de Graff, and which, with some small alterations [Washington] had determined to adopt" was shown to the public. Scholars have long speculated who "Baron de Graff" was. In 1800 "Charles de Krafft, Surveyor and Draftsman" advertised in a local newspaper that he "was employed by [the] government in the year 1791 (at Georgetown) to assist Major L'Enfant to plan and lay down the first draft, for the city of Washington."[29]

L'ENFANT'S URBAN INTENTIONS

Variations on traditional urban planning concepts make L'Enfant's plan for Washington a unique physical and symbolic solution to city design. The beauty of L'Enfant's city was achieved by his sympathetic exploitation of the picturesque landscape. In his "Observations explanatory of the plan," printed on the manuscript map placed before Congress on December 13, 1791, and first published in Philadelphia newspapers on December 26, L'Enfant outlined his methodology. He began by choosing prominent topographical features "commanding the most extensive prospects" for numerous public squares. He then connected them through a system of broad, diagonal avenues for both "prospect and convenience." Lastly, L'Enfant inserted a grid of city streets oriented in the cardinal directions to create neighborhoods around the squares. Fifteen of the squares were dedicated to the states, L'Enfant intending to encourage prominent citizens to buy property contiguous to their states' square. Thus, fifteen far-flung neighborhoods would gradually coalesce with those that would naturally grow up around the public buildings. This ambitious scheme supposed a large population within a few years. However, the multiple squares solved an immediate political problem: treating the proprietors with some equality, although everyone understood that those owning land near the president's house and Capitol had a distinct advantage.[30]

View of Georgetown and the site of the federal city
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-4702

To this simultaneity of functions—a beautiful city that also served pragmatic and political ends—must be added the city's symbolic meaning. On September 9, 1791, Jefferson, Madison, and the commissioners met, choosing "Washington" as the city's name to be located within the "Territory of Columbia." They also determined that the streets on the grid be denominated by letters and numbers. Three days later, Ellicott wrote L'Enfant, "the diagonal Streets are to receive names." The names for the diagonals first appeared on Samuel Hill's engraved map published in the May 1792 issue of the *Massachusetts Magazine.* No known surviving document tells who chose to name the avenues after the states.[31]

Washington's symbolic meaning is embedded in the names of the avenues and their relation to the public squares. There are at least three patterns discernable in the arrangement of the state-named boulevards. Those named for the New England states were located in the northern part of the city, the central states were in the city's center, and the southern states were located on Capitol Hill, the southernmost part of the city. The three largest states (also the only commonwealths)—Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—gave their names to avenues that traversed the entire city. They fell geographically within the city as the states do in the country, Massachusetts to the north, Pennsylvania in the center, and Virginia in the south.

The avenues also seem to have been grouped to reflect America's founding political history. With the exception of Delaware, those radiating from the Capitol were states where the Continental and Confederation Congresses met—Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Delaware may have merited this special location because it was the first state to offer a federal district and the first to ratify the Constitution. The White House and its grounds probably bisect New York Avenue because Washington was inaugurated at Federal Hall in New York. Because L'Enfant determined the placement of the avenues before they were named, and the complex system has such internal logic, it would seem that he originated their names as part of the city's symbolic meaning. Grand scale, the idea that power radiates from centers, and building the names of the states into the national capital's plan all were elements of urban design that L'Enfant would have known from his French heritage.[32]

"Grand scale, the idea that power radiates from centers, and building the names of the states into the national capital's plan all were elements of urban design that L'Enfant would have known from his French heritage."

L'ENFANT'S DOWNFALL

L'Enfant's inability to adapt to the fluid situation the federal government was undergoing during this initial evolutionary period was his downfall. Washington lost faith both in his honesty and judgment, but showed remarkable understanding of his character. In November 1791 L'Enfant ordered his workmen (without consulting the commissioners) to tear down the house Daniel Carroll of Duddington (a nephew of Commissioner Daniel Carroll) was erecting in the middle of one of the new streets. After the episode was settled, Washington wrote the commissioners in mid-December. "His aim is obvious. It is to have as much scope as possible for the display of his talents, perhaps for his ambition….I submit to your consideration whether it might not be politic to give him pretty general, and ample powers for *defined* objects; until you shall discover in him a disposition to abuse them." On February 22, 1792, Jefferson wrote L'Enfant outlining the conditions of his continued employment in subordination to the commissioners. L'Enfant's response on the 26th was a diatribe against the commissioners and the following day Jefferson replied

> *It is understood that you absolutely decline acting under the authority of the present commissioners. If this understanding of your meaning be right, I am instructed by the President to inform you that notwithstanding the desire he has entertained to preserve your agency in the business, the condition upon which it is to be done is inadmissible, and your services must be at an end.*[33]

By the first of August 1792 Alexander Hamilton invited L'Enfant to design an industrial town—both a radiating town plan and a scheme for harnessing the falls of the Passaic River to power adjacent mills—for the Society for the Encouragement of Useful Manufactures at Paterson, New Jersey. L'Enfant remained in the society's employ for less than a year. In 1794 he was in Philadelphia working on Fort Mifflin on an island in the Delaware River. Private employment followed, but he quit all of his projects before they were completed. Most of the rest of L'Enfant's life was spent airing his grievances. Beginning in 1800 (he waited until after Washington's death), L'Enfant submitted ten memorials to Congress asking to be compensated for what he had lost monetarily and in reputation. "Major L'Enfant was of ordinary appearance, except that he had an abstracted manner and carriage in public," wrote painter and art historian William Dunlap in 1834. "It appears that he had the irritability belonging to ambition, but which is falsely made appropriate to genius; and that he thought himself wronged."[34]

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